

Message Text

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FM AMEMBASSY GUATEMALA

TO SECSTATE WASHDC NIACT IMMEDIATE 6681

S E C R E T GUATEMALA 4288

NODIS

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PBOR, GT, BH, UK

SUBJ: DEMARCHE ON BELIZE-GUATEMALA DISPUTE

REF: STATE 158599

1. SUMMARY. IN MEETING WITH ME TODAY, PRESIDENT LAUGERUD EXPRESSED APPRECIATION FOR MESSAGE IN REFTEL AND PARTICULARLY FOR SECRETARY VANCE'S EFFORTS IN KEEPING NEGOTIATIONS ALIVE. PRESIDENT REAFFIRMED HIS ORDERS TO GUATEMALAN ARMY TO KEEP TEN KILOMETERS BACK FROM THE BORDER AND WILL TAKE HALF OF TROOPS AND MOST OF AIR FORCE OFF OF ALERT STATUS. END SUMMARY.

2. PRESIDENT RECEIVED ME AT 9:45 AM TODAY, JULY 8. I OPENED CONVERSATION BY NOTING THAT SITUATION SEEMED CONSIDERABLY IMPROVED THIS MORNING AND PRESIDENT SAID HE WAS, IN FACT, VERY MUCH RELIEVED. I THEN CONVEYED TO PRESIDENT MESSAGE IN REFTEL.

3. PRESIDENT SAID HE WANTED TO RECHECK THE ORDER HE HAD ISSUED TO BE SURE THERE COULD BE NO MISTAKE. HE PICKED UP THE TELEPHONE AND CALLED THE MILITARY BASE AT POPTUN (WHICH HAS JURISDICTION OVER ENTIRE BORDER AREA). HE SPOKE WITH LT. COLONEL MAX ROBERTO SAGASTUME AND REITERATED HIS ORDER THAT, WITH THE EXCEPTION OF THE TWO PLATOONS AT MODESTO

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MENDEZ AND MELCHOR DE MENCOS, NO GUATEMALAN SOLDIER SHOULD COME CLOSER THAN TEN KILOMETERS TO THE FRONTIER. THE TWO PLATOONS SHOULD ALSO, HE TOLD THE COLONEL, ACT WITH GREATEST PRUDENCE; NO FOOLISHNESS, NO ACCIDENTAL SHOTS FIRED, NOTHING THAT COULD PROVOKE AN INCIDENT.

4. TURNING TO THE MEETING BETWEEN FOREIGN MINISTER MOLINA

AND THE SECRETARY MENTIONED REFTTEL, THE PRESIDENT SAID HE HAD INSTRUCTED MOLINA TO GIVE THE SECRETARY A LETTER TO PRESIDENT CARTER STATING GUATEMALA'S COMMITMENT TO A PEACEFUL SETTLEMENT WITH HONOR FOR BOTH PARTIES.

5. CONTINUING LIST OF ACTIONS HE HAD TAKEN TO DEFUSE THE CRISIS, THE PRESIDENT SAID HE HAD MET THURSDAY EVENING WITH REPRESENTATIVES OF SIX OF THE LEADING RADIO NEWS PROGRAMS AND HAD ASKED THEM TO DE-ESCALATE TONE OF THEIR REPORTING OF THE DISPUTE. AT NOON FRIDAY, PRESIDENT WILL MEET WITH HIS DEFENSE MINISTER AND CHIEF OF STAFF AND WILL TELL THEM TO KEEP THE GUARDIA DE HONOR BATTALIONS ON THE ALERT BUT TO GIVE FIFTY PERCENT OF THEM LEAVE FROM NOON TODAY UNTIL MONDAY. HE SAID THAT GUATEMALA'S ELEVEN A-37 AIRCRAFT WERE ALL LOADED WITH BOMBS AND ROCKETS, BUT THAT HE WILL ORDER THAT SEVEN OF THE ELEVEN BE UNLOADED AND TAKEN OFF ALERT STATUS.

6. PRESIDENT SAID IT WOULD BE VERY HELPFUL IN FURTHER CALMING HIS MILITARY COMMANDERS IF HE COULD KNOW MORE EXACTLY WHAT UK HAD MOVED INTO BELIZE ON THURSDAY. BRITISH CONSUL HAD CALLED HIM THURSDAY NIGHT TO SAY THAT VC-10'S HAD BROUGHT IN ONLY A REINFORCED RIFLE COMPANY AND SOME ARMORED CARS, BUT NOTHING ANYWHERE NEAR THE 3,000 TROOPS PRESIDENT HAD FEARED MIGHT BE COMING IN. LAUGERUD SAID THAT IF HE COULD OBTAIN SPECIFIC INFORMATION
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FROM HMG THROUGH USG, HE WOULD HAVE A PUBLIC STATEMENT ISSUED REFUTING SPECULATION ABOUT 3,000 BRITISH SOLDIERS.

7. I SAID I WOULD IMMEDIATELY REPORT THE PRESIDENT'S REQUEST AS WELL AS THE STEPS HE HAD TAKEN TO DEFUSE THE SITUATION, STEPS WHICH SHOULD HELP LOWER THE TENSION. PRESIDENT SAID HE DEEPLY APPRECIATED WHAT USG HAD DONE IN THIS CRISIS. HE WAS ABSOLUTELY SURE THAT IF IT HAD NOT BEEN FOR THE SECRETARY'S PERSONAL INTERVENTION, UK WOULD HAVE REMAINED ENTIRELY NEGATIVE AS IT HAD FOR YEARS. LET US HOPE, HE SAID, THAT WITH THE ROWLANDS VISIT WE CAN ARRIVE AT A GOOD SOLUTION FOR BOTH SIDES.

8. COMMENT: REDUCTION OF TENSION WHICH IS EVIDENT IN GUATEMALAN PRESS FRIDAY MORNING WAS ALSO EVIDENT IN THE PRESIDENT'S ATTITUDE. HE WAS MUCH MORE RELAXED AND CONFIDENT THAN HE HAD BEEN IN OUR TWO CONVERSATIONS YESTERDAY. WITH REGARD TO PRESIDENT'S SUGGESTION THAT WE HELP HIM OBTAIN INFORMATION ON ACTUAL STRENGTH OF FORCES MOVED INTO BELIZE BY BRITISH WHICH HE CAN USE TO CALM HIS MILITARY COMMANDERS, IT STRIKES US THAT THIS WOULD BE AN EASY WAY

FOR BRITISH TO APPEAR RESPONSIVE TO PRESIDENT'S CONCERNS,
WHETHER THEY WISH TO PROVIDE THIS INFORMATION DIRECTLY TO
PRESIDENT OR THROUGH US. WE MIGHT NOTE THAT GOG WILL
PROBABLY OBTAIN THIS INFORMATION EVENTUALLY IN ANY CASE.
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